

Back Again, Back Again: Gold, Part Two

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

Abigail, as the intro: Back Again, Back Again, episode eighteen: Gold.

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

Ilyaas: What else was there to do, now that that was done? We played hangman with an odd mix of Rhysean and English words -- she'd choose Rhysean, I English, both of us reaching for concepts we were certain the other hadn't heard of, each determined to win. I pulled the word *Munchausen* and argued that just because she didn't know the syndrome I meant didn't make my choice less valid. She chose the Rhysean word for *cottage in the woods*, a disastrous monster of a word, letters stretching into the twenties with a horrid combination of vowels. I couldn't remember it -- much less pronounce it -- if I tried.

How the hell would I know that? I asked, gesturing widely to the paper.

How the hell would I know that? She mimicked, jabbing one finger at *Munchausen*.

Theatre games -- party games -- were next, after we both got bored of being word-cruel to each other. I was just complaining at our lack of a third person to play the banger *zip zap zop* when, in an effort to show why it was so cool, I struck my hands in the motion all high-school theatre kids are familiar with -- one palm sliding outwards and past the other moving in, like rubbing your hands together for warmth, like water-bending, but less cool. And -- *shit*.

We both stopped dead. For, just a second as I'd made the motion, my hands had sparked with green-gold magic.

Rhia's eyes were wide as saucers. *Do it again*, she breathed, so I did, striking my hands across each other. They sparked to a glow again, stronger this time, and she let out a tiny, tiny squeak.

I stared, dumbstruck. Then did it again. And again. And again, the glow growing bigger every time.

Holy shit, I finally yelled, scrambling to my feet. *Holy shit -- Rhia -- holy shit!*

Magic -- she cried, a huge grin on her face. *Ilyaas, your magic -- !*

My magic, that I hadn't been able to find. My magic, that I hadn't been able to control.

Holy shit, I repeated.

Is that how you call it? She asked. *With your hands?* She mimicked the sliding motion. *Make it do something.*

Like what? I asked, my chest humming, eyes scraping the room for a trick to perform with. My gaze landed on a book on my bed, one of the children's primary books that had been dug up from the library for me. What was the most classic atypical thing to do? To prove your power? Make it float.

I struck my hands together and thrust my palms out, throwing my will into the motion. *Lift. Lift. Lift.* They sparked, maybe glowed slightly stronger than before, but -- nothing.

Shit, I cursed, and tried again. I narrowed my eyes and leaned into it, every ounce the fool, but nothing changed. Nothing moved. The glow died just as suddenly as it had come, the same as always happened with my sword, conduit that it was.

All it's doing is making the glow, same as the sword. I don't know how to command it.

Rhia blinked. *Command*, she mouthed, then let her legs slam to the floor and stood. She fumbled around for a piece of paper from the desk and set it on the bed. *Ilyaas, a command. Ask the magic to do what you want. Do not expect it to know.*

I struck my hands again, and feeling stupid, said *lift*.

It didn't move, not even when I stared till my eyes shook.

I looked back to Rhia. She was frowning, concentration coloring her face. *Try to say it in Rhysean. Erm -- the word for lift. Please-lift, you-lift, is -- viens. Pers, please. Viens, life.* She pronounced it, slowly, three times over, then motioned for me to try. *Viens*, she reminded, and mimed striking her hands like zip-zap-zop.

I took a deep breath -- in, out. Said the word in my mind -- gave it intention, asked and much as commanded, and let it leave my lips -- *viens, pers viens* -- as I pushed my palms past each other and out.

Magic sparked. The paper rose.

The paper rose.

Rhia yelped, a victory, and punched a fist in the air.

I beamed, disbelieving, dumbfounded, at the piece of paper buffeted by wind on all sides, never floating far before being held back in place.

Holy shit, was all that I could think. My brain was stuck on the idea of *magic*.

How did you know? I finally said, my voice rough and hollow-sounding. I couldn't bring myself to lower my eyes from the paper, was scared to drop my hand on fear the results could never be replicated.

She smiled, a small thing that crept up the side of her face. *It is in the old legends. They say that the last eligida talked to the wind.*

I laughed and dropped my hands. The paper fell, and I took Rhia's hands, spinning her round in a circle until I hit my hip on the bed and fell down cursing. I laughed through the pain, my eyes watering, hip smarting, and as she gave me a hand and helped me up, I asked, *tell me more?*

Regin, she said, *is to fold. pers regins -- please-fold, you-fold.*

We said it together, once, twice, three times, then I narrowed my eyes at the piece of paper and whispered *regins* as I struck my hands together. Still on the bed from where it had drifted, as I pictured it in my head, folding in half and fourths, the paper sloppily mimicked the idea I'd had, corners not lining up, not with smooth creases, but -- *it folded.*

We tried *fire* next, but that didn't work, so Rhia had me try to *burn* instead, which did -- the paper began to smoke and smoulder before catching into flames the more I focused -- on the bed, which, too, began to smoke and smoulder. We both freaked, and I dropped my hands -- but it only lessened the flame, didn't put it out, the natural course having taken over, so Rhia and I squeaked and smothered it with blankets and got water from the pitcher in the bathroom to put it out. The room

now smelled like smoke, and my quilt was damaged if you looked, but we were fine.

I think I need to lift it, first, I said. I knew the word for and -- *et*, same as Latin -- and with *viens et furums* a new piece of paper lifted and set itself aflame.

We let it burn itself out, become a pile of ash and nothing before I dropped it to the floor.

Rhia and I continued like that for several hours -- her giving me words, testing to see what worked and what didn't, until we found the magic responded to infinitive and intention rather than to-become. *To burn* instead of simply *fire*. *To lift* instead of *wind*.

As the time progressed, a headache built, pounding, in my skull. It was nothing, at first -- showing up after the second *to burn*, small and hardly meaningful, until it grew, and grew, me trying to ignore it, wanting to keep discovering.

But my blood was humming in the wrong key -- and a *danger*, *danger*, flashed behind my eyes so loud and sudden that I stumbled backwards and sat down, hard. What had been good, a rightening of my balance at first had become painful and heart-shaking, a thundering in my ears as my body flushed and my heart worked overtime.

A wave of nausea struck me, hard and fast, and it took all of my effort not to throw up all over my pretty midnight-gold

dress. I lost the battle, and stumbled into the bathroom just in time to throw up into the chamber pot.

Rhia dropped to her knees beside me and hesitantly, slowly rubbed my back. *Are you alright?* She asked, her voice laced with worry.

I sucked in a deep breath and pulled myself up. *Fine*, I said. I was not fine. I readied myself and tried for another *to lift*, this time on the desk, larger than anything I'd tried.

I didn't get past striking my hands before the nausea hit me again, harder, everything screaming, and I found myself throwing up again, somehow back in the bathroom.

I sat for the next hour or so with my head in between my knees, trying not to let my brain leak out of my ears as my blood screamed.

What we had learned was this: magic requires intention, magic requires Rhysean. Magic has limits. Magic has consequences.

And what's more, the message was clear: don't over-use magic.

[**FX:** The whirr of the cassette machine fades out. "Nightingales" once more fades in, just as cheerfully.]

Abigail, as the outro: Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you'd like to hear more about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan, and is licensed under an Attribution License. The song was retrieved from FreeMusicArchive.org. Visit the description of this episode for full copyright information and a link to the page. Sound effect attribution, similarly, can be found in the episode description.

If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. You are important in this world and have a role no one else can fill. You are loved. I hope you have a wonderful day.